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Agony and Protest in the Select Dalit Women Autobiographies: A Critical Study

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Introduction:-

The present study comprises an evaluation of agony and protest in the select Dalit women's autobiographies such as Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohra Abhishap* (1999),Mayawati's *Mere sangarshmai Jeevan evem Bahujan movement ka Sajarnama (*2006),Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan* (2007) and Baby Tai Kamble's *Jina Amucha* (2008). These women writers are born in the Dalit community and they are the well known activists in the Dalit and Feminist struggle in India. Their autobiographies throw light on the material circumstances under the Dalit women asserted their selfhood and emerged as activist in the movements. Their work can help to show how the exclusion of Dalit women's voices in the caste biased Indian Society. These autobiography are available in English translations as Kaushalya Baisantri's *Double curse* , Mayawatis – *A Travelogue Of My Struggle – ridden life and of Bahujan Samaj* – (2006), Urmila Pawar's "*The Weave Of My Life*" (2008) and Baby Tai Kamble's "*The Prision We Broke"* (2008).

This research work attempts to reveal autobiographies by Dalit women writers the crucial expression of caste and cultural discriminatory self experiences and voicing of socio-historical structures of caste system. Efforts of Jotiba Phule and Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar in creating consciousness among Dalit women are praiseworthy. Appearance of Dalit women in male autobiographies like sacrificing mother, pain enduring and suffering wife, this motivated Dalit women to write about their own life experiences. Dalit women have acquired remarkable confidence to write about their life narratives, as they have been in public spheres rights from the early decades of twentieth century. Dalit women's autobiographies underscore caste as an oppressive tradition. Autobiography become the most appropriate way to express their agony. And we also see the protest for the identity in their writings.

Dalit means 'oppressed' in Sanskrit and broken/scattered in Hindi, is a term mostly used for the castes in Indian that have been subjected to untouchability. Dalit were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as framing a fifth varna, known by the name of panchama. The term 'Dalit' was in use as translation for the British raj census classification of depressed classes prior to 1935 it was popularized by the economist and reformer Dr.B.R.Ambedkar (1891-1956), himself a Dalit. And in the 1970"s its use was invigorated when it was adopted by the Dalit panthers activist group. India's national commissions for scheduled castes considers official use of Dalit as a label to be unconstitutional because registration prefers scheduled castes, however some sources say that Dalit has encompassed more communities than the official term of scheduled castes and its sometimes use to all of India's oppressed people.

Dalit literature is a literature of protest pain and agony. Its beginning can be traced back to the undocumented oral folklore and tales of the past decades. Most of the Dalit literature is the voice of the voiceless in the caste-rooted Indian Society. A commendable effort has been made by the Dalit about their lives. Dalit literature is written by the Dalit about their lives. Dalit literature forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature. It is often compared with African-American literature especially in its depiction of issues of racial segregation and injustice, as seen in slave narratives. Dalit literature has found for its self a very prominent space amongst the literature of India. Dalit writing is a post-

independence literary phenomenon *Arjun Dangle* has defined Dalit literature as, Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India.

An autobiography is a written account of the life of him/her written by him/herself. Human consciousness is lively reflected through the autobiographies. Autobiography has its origin in the West. An autobiography is based on the writer's memory. The word *'autobiography'* was first used deprecatingly by *William Taylor* in 1797 in English periodical the monthly review. Robert Southey used it in its present sense in 1809. In antiquity such works were typically entitled apologia, purporting to be self-justification. John Henry Newman's autobiography entitled *Apologia provitasua* was published in 1864 is a reference to this tradition.

Though the term autobiography was coined in the eighteenth century, the genre had been practiced from the Greek literature. There have been conflicting theories regarding the origin of this form of writing. With some attributing it to the Christian era whilst others Claiming this form of writing to be present ever since the light of civilization. Since then the trends in the writing of autobiography have changed over the centuries. The word *'autobiography'* derived from the three Greek words, autos, bios and self, autobiography means writing of the self. The oxford English dictionary defines autobiography as the story of the person's life written by that person. Smith and Watson quote the famous critic to state the definition of autobiography, the description (graphia) of an individual human life (bios) by the individual himself (qutos). Autobiography has a philosophical dignity and is the highest and most instructive form in which the understanding of life comes before us. Though popular citations would credit Robert Southey with the coinage of the term autobiography, but the term originally coined in the preface to a collection of poems by the eighteenth century English working class writer Ann Yearsley.

As a form of literature, autobiography has its own distinctive characteristics. Primarily, autobiography is an eye – witness record of one's life written by the author himself/herself. Although autobiography shares some features with other types of writing like memoir, confession, diary journal, travelogue, letters, and biography, its main focus is the man/woman himself/herself who writes it to portray the growth and development of his/her personality.

Autobiographical novel is also a distinct literary form autobiography proper. In such a novel, there is just a co-relation between the experiences of the author and the experiences of the character. It shares more characteristics of the form of novel rather them that of an autobiography. It is more a work of fiction and like all other fictional works; it is colored by the imagination of its author.

A *diarist* writes down his experiences in a chronological order. He records his experiences at a particular moment and goes on adding to them his further experiences at different moments in his life. It seems that a diarist interested more in the chronology of events rather them the events themselves.

Reminiscence and memoir are autobiographical in nature but they are different from the autobiography in their purpose and content. The main purpose behind the writing of an autobiography is to draw a faithful and first – hand portrayal of the hero, whereas the author of a memoir is interested in contemporary events and other says.

There are a few similarities between *confession and autobiography*. Like autobiography, the main purpose of writing a confession is self-revelation. The writer of a confession tries to draw his own faithful portrayal and while doing so, he reveals his own self to the readers. The writers himself is the

hero of the confession and so the subjectivity becomes an essential aspect of his narrative similarly, an autobiographer is also subjective in his approach.

The Nature of study:

The Nature of study provides the Dalit women's select autobiographical work, the feminist voices in Dalit literature. These autobiographies projects on various socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political dimensions of Dalits in caste system in India. It presents the revolutionary expression on caste, culture, politics and gender which affected by the social and literary movements. We see the protest of Dalit women writers against the caste system.

Kausalya Baisantri is a Dalit woman writer and a social activist. She was born in Nagpur (maharashtra). Her autobiography '*Dohara Abhishap'* (1999) is very significant in denoting the doubly marginalized status of Dalit women in Indian Society and family. She has emerged as a new face of Dalit feminism in India.

Her autobiography '*Dohara Abhishap'* is written in Hindi though she herself is a Marathi when it was published it created a very Hugh impact in Hindi Dalit literature because it was written by a Dalit woman who expressed her feelings and situation quite openly. *Kausalya Baisantri* though is an educated Dalit woman but she remains a house wife throughout her life and suffers with maltreatment of her husband on one side and caste hatred of caste people on another side. Her autobiography resembles a diary that tells about troubles with maintaining self-esteem during her studies and in her rather frustrating married life. She addresses the social reality and the problems that arise among Dalit themselves, and particularly between Dalit men and women.

She describes the agonies she faced during her strained relationship with her husband. The narrative starts with the details of her family, her life and childhood. She states that her mother often curses herself for giving birth to five daughters as female child was not liked in any Indian family. This is an evidence of gender discrimination in dalit communities. Her mother often laments an hardships in upbringing their children. Baisantri remembers her own mother who suffered more than her due to illiteracy. The evil of untouchability rampant in Hindu society is explored when she was a student in Bhide Kanyashala. She was describes that her married life with Devendra was not a happier one. Her married life reveals the behavior of her husband towards her and his won siblings. He was an egoistic and hypocrite. Baisantri concludes form her own life experience that the women suffer the most whenever suppression and oppression of Dalits take place in the society.

Mayawati Prabhu Das commonly known as *mayawati* or *kumari Mayawati* born on 15 jan 1956 in New Delhi. Mayawati is the youngest woman chief minister in India, as well as the first Dalit chief minister of India. Born in a poor Dalit family .she got herself an education, made her way into politics and made a name for herself. Mayawati is an Indian politician who has spent four separate terms as chief minister of utter Pradesh. She is the national president of the Bahujan Samaj Party which focuses on a platform a social change to improve the lives of the weakest strata of Indian society. Mayawati released a volume of her autobiography in Hindi '*Mere sangarshmai jeevan evam Bahujan movement ka safarnama*' on her 50th birthday in 2006 by Kanshiram. In her autobiography she focuses on her life, education and political career, how she become the iron lady. She talks about

her family, the sons in the family were sent to private schools, while the daughters went to low performing government schools.

In her autobiography she states that in her childhood when she was eight, her family had moved to a resettlement colony for Dalits outside Delhi, Juggli, Jupri colony or shack township, which had no sanitation or power. Not the colony is part of Delhi's vast sprawl. The scrubby wasteland further she states her agony that she never plays between school, the buffalo and house work, there was not much time. She already knew what caste meant. Her family was "Chamar", tanners and leatherworkers among the most unclean of all. How the teenage Mayawati was shooed away from a communal tap because she was a chamar. She got in to a huge fight. And it happened often. People would try not to get in an argument with her. Her gather pushed the young Mayawati to study for civil service exams. She took on part-time teaching work in private collages to pay for her own further education.

Urmila pawar is an Indian writer belongs to the Dalit community. She writes in Marathi,an Indian language.she also identifies herself as a feminist. Urmila Pawar is a literary personality. She was born and brought up in kokan. According to dharmarajan, her work as a writer reflects her experience of the difficulties of being a women and a Dalit. When she was 12 years old she and her family converted to Buddhism along with other members of their community offer Dr.B.R.Ambedkars call to people from the Dalit community to renounce Hinduism. Pawar was acutely aware of her caste identity even as a child because of the repeated instances of discrimination and humiliation she faced in her school and other places. The original title of Urmila Pawars memoir is *'Aaydan'* a word from the local dialect spoken in the village that from the background of her life. 'Aaydan' is the name for the cane baskets. Aaydan,urmila pawars thought provoking memoir spare no one including herself. Umila Pawar is one of the foremost literary figures in Marathi. In her autobiographical book '*Aaydan*' (*the weave of my life*-2007) she talks about the poverty faced by her family. *Aaydan* her autobiography written in Marathi has been translated into English. The title 'The weave' is the metaphor of the writing technique employed by Pawar, the lives of different life of Dalits, the manifold in which caste asserts itself and grinds them down. Her experiences in world terms of education learning livelihood and the emergence of individual identity in the modern .

She describes in her autobiography the long journey from konkan to Mumbai bringing out the struggle of three generations women for a Dalit modernity. The complexities of the life of the Dalit women in a rapidly transforming society, issues of identify, caste and patriarchy are brought to light. By providing sensitive details of caste discrimination and poverty Pawar reveals the limitations of a low caste person. She gives a sketch of Dalit internal suffering of pain and pathos. She describes the experiences of gender discrimination in their own family when her father neglects her sister after her marriage. Her father never took care of her sister. Urmila Pawar fells that for outsiders and society, her father was a reformist but for his own daughters he has patriarchal approach. Pawar portrays the life of exploited and oppressed women who accepted the harsh reality of being women and Dalit.

Baby Tai Kamble was a veteran of dalit movement in Maharashtra. Inspired by the radical leadership of Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar, she had been involved with the struggle from a very young age. She has established a government approved residential school for social backward students in Nimbure, a small village near Phaltan. She had been honored with awards for her literary and social work. The

autobiography of Baby Tai kamble is in Marathi '*Jina Amucha'* which is translated in English as *The prison we broke* "(2008) is the first work that in Dalit literature which is written by a women. The book deals with the two major problems of the society. Firstly the oppression and exploitation towards women in a patriarchal society. She talks about her life in her village. In her memory, the Dalit people never had a prosperous life. On one side ignorance and lack of reasoning ruled them, on the other side, the life was dominated by poverty and death rate was high because of the ceaseless starvation and lack of medical facilities.

In her autobiography she emphasizes on the caste discrimination faced by the Mahar community in Maharashtra They have to experience insecurity, domestic violence and male dominance in the patriarchal family system in India her autobiography narrates the experiences of Dalit women in terms of insecurities, violence and domination they suffered in patriarchal community. They were treated as untouchable servants 'Yeskars'. They were not even allowed to walk on the road that is used by the high caste people. Her agony is expressed as, "When somebody form these castes walked form the opposite direction, the Mahars had to leave the road, climb down in to the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the road side. she depicts the pathetic condition of women. She presents on unflinching portrait of the Mahar community.

Dalit women writers wrote their autobiographies in a more assertive and rebellious manner. Educated Dalit writers wrote about their oppression, agony and protest through their writings. Like male writers Dalit women also raised their voice through their autobiographies expressing their agony.Dalit literature poses a major challenge to the dominant society. Dalit and women's autobiographies displays a tremendous skepticism towards the society. Dalit autobiographies are literary forms of social protest practices, After that there come the flood of Dalit autobiographies. Due to atrocities of upper caste, the lower caste people were infuriated. Dalit started writing their woes.

Autobiographies of Dalit women writers addresses various issues related to subaltern section, their protest and agony. The Dalit feminist struggle began when the upper caste womes's movement discarded the category of caste as impactful of the women's position, Dalit writers are concerned with the pathetic condition of the Dalits. They help fellow Dalits to be alert and struggle for their rights, which are denied to them by the so called upper castes. As memories, Dalit autobiographies are the sources of Dalits social reality in contemporary India.

In their autobiographies, Kamble, Pawar, Baisantri and Mayawati expressed how Dalit women experienced subjugation form their own community as well as the larger society. In the Process of protesting the age old oppression, they assert themselves and their lives following with an endeavour to open up their inner world to the readers. The doors to the culture of Dalits are opened up through dalit autobiographies.

Form the autobiography of Dalit women a significant contribution of to Dalit literature. They become the tools to understand the consciousness of Dalit women. The writing of Dalit women represent their own experiences, their burning indignation and protest against the caste and gender discriminations prevalent in the society. Many Dalit women started awakened and giving literary expression to their suffering. The voice of Dalit women is an intense cry for justice. Their autobiographies reflect a burning desire for freedom from the clutches of caste and discrimination.

The reason to take these autobiographies for study is that to explore the importance of Dalit autobiographies and its significant more in terms of reconstructing Dalit political history through memories of struggle and expression of caste discrimination. It also examines how Dalit autobiographies mark a formidable literary alternative formulation by breaking the established norms , content and form of the mainstream autobiography. From the four autobiographies examined, it becomes evident that education has potential for the liberation of Dalits. They battled to gain entry to schools. Caste discrimination is common among the Dalits in India. The Dalit writers, contrarily narrate the discrimination and humiliation is explored in the autobiographies.

Dalit women writers are concerned with pathetic condition of the Dalit. They help the fellow Dalit women to be alert and protest for their rights , which are denied to them by the so-called upper castes. Dalit autobiographies are the sources of Dalit to protest for the social reality in contemporary India. Dalit women writers protest for their rights through their autobiographies. In the post Ambedker period, Dalit women used literature as a weapon of protest in feminist writing. To raise voice against injustice, but strongly protest. Dalit women writers have strongly apposed untouchability in their autobiographies. The highest purpose of Dalit writings is not beauty of craft, but authenticity of experience and protest.

Womens autobiographies deals mainly with the emotional turbulence of women and their relationship in the social setup. Nevertheless twentieth century came up with women writers exposing extraordinarily intellectual and dashing women writers like kamala Das *my story* Shobha De's *selective memory stories from my life* Kiran Bedi's *I dare* , Sunity devee's *The autobiography of Indian Princess* Mrinal pandy's *Daughters daughter* Taslima Nasreen's *My childhood days* .They are longer passive , sub missive 'Sita' or 'Savitri' but dashing, bold and innovative in their techniques of writing also. They express the inner search of women with womens's point of view.

Feminist theory focuses on analyzing gender inequality. Themes explored in Feminism include discrimination, objectification (especially sexual objectification) oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, art history and contemporary art and aesthetics. Women's and gender studies contemporary Feminist Theory is intended to offer both an overview of feminist theories and women's movements in Canada and elsewhere in the world and a critical discussion of varieties of feminism as they pertain to issues such as gender violence, reproduction, work families, and sexuality. The course and the readings in the course attempt to recognize the differences among women according to factors such as class, race, sexual orientation, citizenship and physical ability. It is hoped that the course indicates the tremendous changes that have come about with respect to issues in Feminist theory in the last 50 years or so.

1.Intersectionality :-

Intersectionality in feminism refers to oppression of socially diverse women, in other words, intersectionality is based on the idea to recognize the struggle and oppression of women form different social, political economic and cultural backgrounds and circumstances. It also includes men's rights like the idea of toxic masculinity is very much prominent in every culture but the ways of tackling them is different in various circumstances.

2.Recognising Patriarchy :-

The first step is to recognize that we do live in a society which discriminates against women. While we do live in a society which is dominated by men, this system which call patriarchy all affects men. When we say it affects men here we talking about the idea men have to deal with running the house and holding positions, being strong, emotionless and angry and feel afraid of being vulnerable.

3.Violence against women :-

The one of the key areas where all feminists agree on is fighting violence against women. Violence against women is practiced in different ways in different culture with different patriarchal connotations to they are present in the form of domestic violence, rape sex slavery, child marriage sati, forced marriage, honor killing, female genital mutilation, mob violence, female infanticide, dowry violence, prenatal sex selection etc. The list is endless.

4.Challenging Statuesquo :-

One of the primary feature of feminism, it challenges statusquo it challenges present society structure and value in society which assert gender roles, and social, political, cultural, sexual and economic discrimination against women with gender being the primary motive behind it. Status quo can be challenged in different. Ways in different culture has a base on which male dominance and discrimination against women is based.

5.Recognizing Men's Rights :-

While there is an overall consensus that women are primarily the victims patriarchy and sexism in society there is a new kind of thinking emerging which has recognized that men are also affected by patriarchal norms which leads of them facing emotional and mental traumas. By a study, it has been said that men in middle ages are most likely to commit suicide because of the pressure to earn money for the family. Leading to many discouraging their wives from working leading to problems at work and their interpersonal relations.

6.Religion :-

Feminism talks about what role religion plays in imposing misogyny and misogynistic practice on women and what role it has played in maintaining status quo. Feminism see religion very negatively when it comes to gender equality. In order to be a feminist, you should be able to recognize sexism and misogyny that exists on in your religion and others, analyze it logically religious practices such as dowry, sati, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, polygamy, anti- abortion etc. have helped keep male dominance alive.

Aims and objectives:

The aim of this research is to create awareness about the condition of the Dalit women in the Indian society. The Dalit women who faced the brutal problems from the upper caste people, their struggle for identity; they were abused by the male dominated society.

The objectives of the research work are as follows:

- To recognize and analyze the agony and protest of the Dalit women in male dominating society.

- To understand the way caste and culture together denigrate and dominate the Indian Dalit women, and their protest.
- To find out their agony and how they protest for the self respect.
- To examine Dalit culture to its perspectives towards the women.
- To examine how the discourses of the main stream women's movement and Dalit movement.

The Research Problem:

The research work will try to focus on the issues regarding Dalit women, who have face multiple problems like caste, culture, politics, gender, poverty and social exclusion. The selected autobiographies reflect humiliating expressions. These selected women writers dared to swim against the tide and have played the important role not only for women in Dalit community but for all Indian women. They are considered as a second class and a weaker sex. Their struggle for identity as a woman and the agony and protest will try to focus.

Hypothesis:

- The rigid nature of caste and culture exploits the lives of Dalit women.
- The Dalit women writers focus on the issues of caste discrimination practiced in the Indian society.
- Dalit writers throw light on the wretched lives of Dalits by experiencing the process of self discovery, identification and empowerment.
- Dalit women writers understood that they are prohibited by caste and were cursed to remain poor and Dalits.
- Dalit writers have developed autobiography as narrative of resistance against caste system.
- Patriarchy works at the every layer of Indian society.
- Dalit women writer express the collective experiences of hurt and humiliation.
- Dalit women writers straight forwardly addresses the social reality and the problems that arise between Dalits and non-Dalits.

Limitation of the study:

The present study is limited to the autobiographical works to the four Dalit female writers. The research is limited to the autobiographies of Kaushalya Baisantri's '*Dohra Abhishap*' Mayawati's '*Mere sangarshmai jeevan evam Bahujan movement ka safarnama'* Urmila pawar's *'Aaydan'* and BabyTai Kamble's '*Jina Amucha'* excluding their other literary outputs.

Research Methodology:

The research method to be adopted will be one of the descriptive and analytical type in which feminist perspective will be used; since the mainstream feminist movement has failed to understand the problems of Dalit women in particular, Dalit feminist perspective will be used to analyze, the different

issues regarding women. Phule-Ambedkarite perspective has emerged in India as new research method to study the Dalit literature as well as other works from social science. Influenced articulations of experienced caste discrimination in Dalit women's autobiographies.

Sources of the study:-

Primary sources:-

The primary sources will be the original novels or the autobiographies available in print by Kausalya baisantri, Mayawati, Urmila pawar, and Baby Tai kamble.

Secondary sources:-

The secondary sources are includes the criticism published on these four Dalit female writer. And the journals, magazines, periodicals, articles, projects, scholarly books which are published taken to study.

The Relevance and significance of the study:

The study will help us to show that Dalit women are certainly becoming aware of themselves, confronting the continuing tyranny of caste system in the Indian society and the prolonged neglect of cast issues, at the same time challenging gender injustice in the society. In the process, they are clearly moving beyond the presentation and analysis of their causes in Dalit women in India and arguing their own case both realistically and forcefully. It would be significant to study and examine these four autobiographies by Dalit women placed in different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Tentative chapter scheme:

Chapter I

Chapter I is the introductory chapter which includes the definition of Dalit and the Dalit literature, and the history of autobiography and role of autobiography in literature.

Chapter II

The chapter II deals with the portrayal of the Dalit women in the select autobiographies. The study will also try to compare Dalit women writers set in different regional cultural, caste, religious, traditional backgrounds and their life pictured in selected Dalit women's autobiographies

Chapter III

The third chapter will examine the dynamics of caste, culture. This aspect has also varied implication in the two different cultural sets that the four Dalit women writers hail from. And this chapter also deals with the agony which the writers express in their autobiographies.

Chapter IV

The fourth chapter will bring out the protest elements in these four autobiographies, the revolt against the caste system through their autobiographies. Dalit women raise voices through their writings. It provides the outburst and revolt against the caste system and culture. It is like a counter struggle against established system. It will attempt to show the content aspects of protest and the expressive aspect of protest in Dalit women's autobiographies. It will also try to focus on how they recognized and

revolt against their oppressions in the hands of various social and political institutions like caste system, untouchability, patriarchy and culture.

Chapter V

This fifth and concluding chapter will record the conclusion derived from the study. And it touches the area related to translate theory.

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